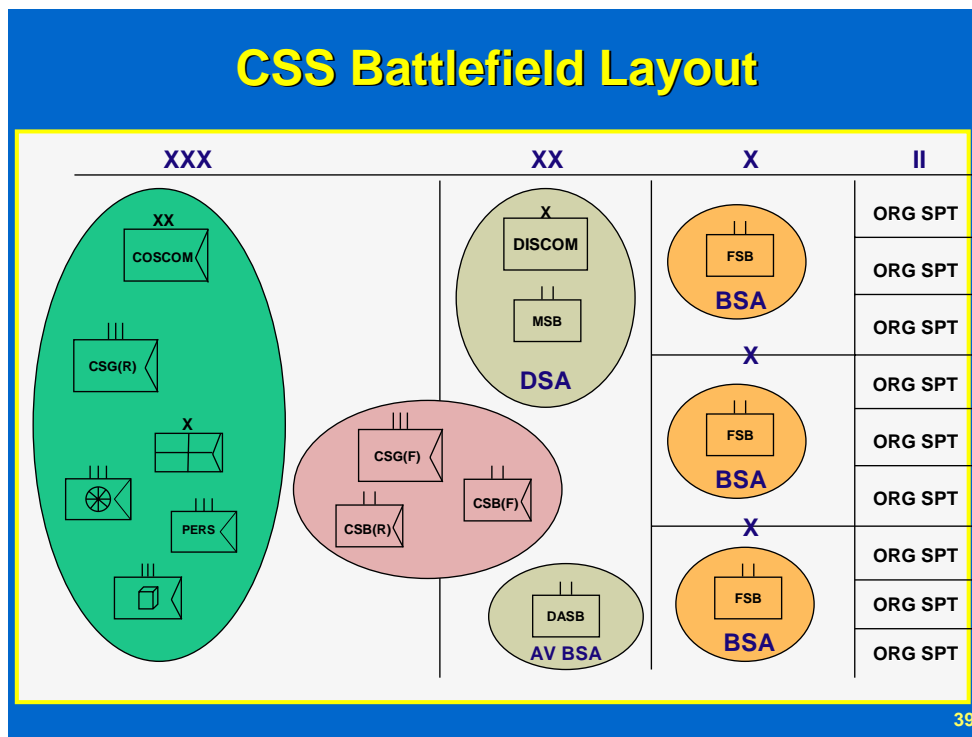
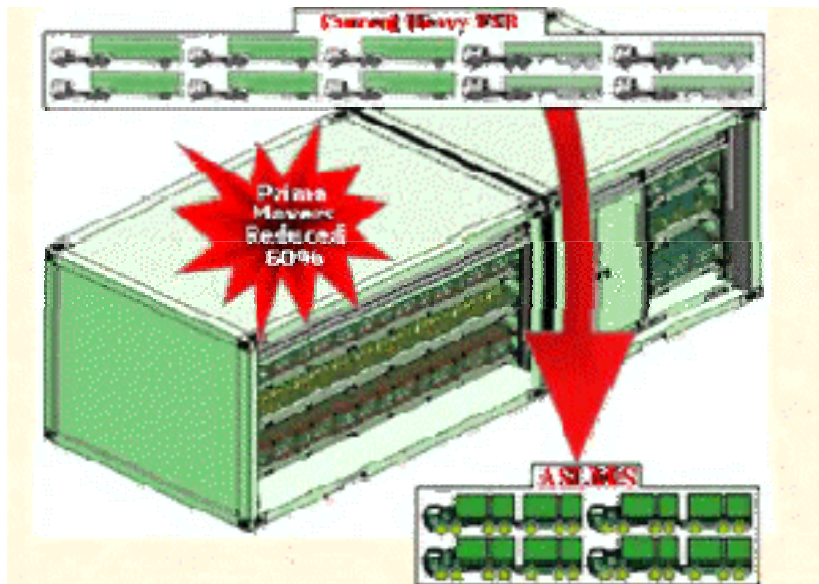


Supply Distribution on the Non-Linear Battlefield Where is the REAR?



Every Army logistician from the last 10-15 years remembers this slide from their time spent at the Army Logistics Management College at Fort Lee, VA. This layout is so ingrained in our minds that it has worked its way into our thought process. Whenever I am speaking to someone about tactical battlefield distribution, this chart automatically pops into my head. This chart shows clear, well-defined boundaries between different levels of support organizations from corps to battalion level. Recently, when I was asked how the non-linear battlefield will affect distribution of supplies and traditional missions of support units I became very puzzled and answered with "I don't know."

I know that there are many innovations in technology that allow for faster and more reliable logistics support. For example, The Authorized Stockage List Mobility System (ASLMS) was developed to maximize storage space and reduce the logistics footprint for CL IX by 60%. This system replaces traditional ASL containers, M871 Trailers and shop sets used by Supply/Support Activities (SSAs). The ASLMS uses the Palletized Load System (PLS) trailer as its primary transportation platform. It provides easy access to parts and is easy to transport and store.



This and many other logistics distribution breakthroughs are arriving at a fast pace. Automated tracking systems for in transit visibility of supplies are allowing logisticians and warfighters to track their supplies as they arrive from all over the world. The Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) website lists several discussions, articles, PowerPoint briefings and papers on the subject of the changing battlefield. The new equipment that the Army has and the ability to track supplies real-time is amazing; however, the distribution of supplies from Combat Service Support (CSS) to combat units within the traditional Communication Zone (COMMZ) is the where the real challenge lies. The "Last 5 dirty meters" has now become increased by hundreds of kilometers.

The traditional three dimensional linear battlefields allowed logisticians to have the peace of mind that any road, hill or empty soda can up to the Forward Line of Troops (FLOT) was safe. Main Supply Routes (MSRs) ran from the Corps Storage Area (CSA) in the Corps rear all the way to the Brigade Support Areas (BSAs) and forward to the Logistics Release Points (LRPs). Lessons learned from units deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and subsequent rotations have proven that not only is the rear not safe, but in fact, it is non-existent.

As an instructor at the Combined Logistics Captains Career Course (CLC3), I taught the traditional "theater to the foxhole" distribution doctrine. This doctrine provided for the placement of GS and DS CSS units on the battlefield. Every Brigade Combat Team (BCT) had a Forward Support Battalion (FSB) for its DS needs and every FSB had a Main Support Battalion (MSB) or a Corps Support Battalion (CSB) for backup or reinforcing support. The distribution of supplies between these units was managed by the Material Management Centers (MMCs) at division and corps levels.

I recently served as a Unit Mobilization Assistor (UMA) for the 620th CSB. The traditional role of a forward CSB such as the 620th is to provide direct support to corps units operating in the division rear area, provide area support to any unit in or passing through its area of operations and to provide backup and reinforcing support to the MSB and FSBs. The mission the 620th received for OIF3 took the unit out of its traditional role and placed it in a role of providing direct support (much like the job of an FSB) to an infantry task force and the Marines operating in Fallujah. This resembles the support mission that would be required for a Unit of Action (UA).

The CALL website also contains articles that address the future of MMCs. The fact that combat units are no longer aligned perfectly within the boundaries of a linear battlefield means

that CSS units can no longer position themselves in their traditional geographic locations. Support units now co-locate within the region that UAs are responsible for (much like the mission of the 620th CSB). Ideas for the utilization of traditional GS CSS units include consolidation into a large area somewhere out of the high threat areas and splitting off GS support teams to co-locate with the FSBs in order to provide GS support forward thus reducing the turn around time for supplies.

Distribution of supplies has moved to more of an area support mission based on the geographical locations of the customer units and the continued threat to supply convoys. For instance, if a division mobilizes to OIF the brigades and battalions may have missions spread throughout the area of operations. Our MMCs have the additional responsibility to support forces from other nations when involved in coalition missions. Geographical separation of units and commands has sparked new concepts in the support community such as Material Management Teams (MMTs).

The 19th Support Center (MMC) deployed to OIF 1. The unit's mission was to support V Corps customer units. Camp Anaconda served as the Corps Distribution Center (CDC). Due to the geographical separation and varying needs of the customer units the 19th Support Center used MMTs. The MMTs were tasked with supporting units that are within specific geographical regions. These teams consist of MOS specific qualified soldiers assigned to specific unit types. For example, MSG Malone (a current member of the 3rd Battalion, 383 Regiment, Training Support Battalion) along with a 92A E-8, and a 92F E-6 were assigned to an MMT that supported the Polish Multinational Division.



MSG Marcus Malone (center, standing)

In addition to changes to supply distribution, the disappearance of the linear battlefield requires changes in the conduct of the rear fight. Maybe such a concept does not even exist any more. Regardless, the rear fight has always been the responsibility of the logistics community. The Assistant Division Commanders for Support and Deputy Corps Commanders have traditionally focused their efforts to the protection of our lines of communication. CSS units were tasked with the responsibility to provide internal protection of facilities and supplies. This was relatively easy to accomplish in a linear environment. Now that there is a 360 degree threat and the virtual disappearance of the traditional rear area on the battlefield, CSS units have to co-locate within the customers that they support for reasons of force protection.

The Army of today is fighting a different war than in the past. The overwhelming might of the US Forces has required our enemies to evolve into an unpredictable adversary. Logistics support

must still occur no matter what the situation is. Everyday our armored vehicles still require fuel and repair parts. Soldiers require the same number of meals. Distribution of these supplies has had to change with the times and will continue to evolve to meet the needs of our Army. Our challenge is transform the community out of the linear mind frame in order to properly support a non-linear battlefield. This type of distribution is beginning to take shape today.

-MAJ Mark E. Neubauer and MSG Marcus R. Malone